

Parent's Guide to: 8th Grade ELA Instructional Materials

**Review and ratings provided by Common Sense Media*

Call of the Wild Jack London  age 12+  Thrilling, violent tale of dog's survival in 1890s Alaska.	Parents need to know that Jack London's classic novel <i>The Call of the Wild</i> was originally published in 1903. It traces the journey of a dog named Buck from domestic family life to pulling sleds during the Klondike Gold Rush of the 1890s, and then heeding the pull of his natural instincts to return to the wild. This is a story of survival and includes a great deal of brutality that may be upsetting to animal lovers. Dogs are clubbed and whipped. Animals fight each other to the death, and tear out the throats of dogs and men. The book also has some bigoted and sexist portrayals of humans. At one stage in Buck's story, he's owned by two men who are described as "... a black-faced giant called Francois. Perrault was a French-Canadian, and swarthy; but Francois was a French-Canadian half-breed, and twice as swarthy." Native Americans commit a ruthless attack in the book as well, killing dogs and men. And the only woman who figures in the story acts like a spoiled child, by turns overfeeding the dogs (which leads to insufficient food and starvation later) and overworking them. Ultimately, however, this is a story about the power of a dog's natural instincts, and the dignity that animals deserve.
The Diary of Anne Frank: A Play Frances Goodrich & Albert Hackett  age 11+  Inspiring wartime journal reveals teen's inner life.	<i>The Diary of Anne Frank</i> is the personal diary of a Jewish teenager who documented her life while hiding from Nazi persecution during World War II. The book explores themes of courage, hope, resilience, prejudice, and the human impact of the Holocaust. It contains mature content, including descriptions of war, discrimination, fear, and death, as well as brief discussions of puberty, female anatomy, menstruation, and Anne's natural curiosity about human development and sexuality. While these passages are presented in an educational and age-appropriate context, parents should be aware of this sensitive content. The memoir provides valuable opportunities for discussions about history, empathy, human rights, and personal growth.

Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl the Definitive Edition

Anne Frank, Otto M. Frank

✓ age 11+ ★★★★★

Inspiring wartime journal reveals teen's inner life.

Parents need to know that Anne Frank's diary is a singular, moving look at World War II from a young girl's perspective. The Franks, along with another family, the Van Daans, hide in order to avoid capture during the German occupation of Holland. Aided by friends on the outside, Anne and the others spend two years in the "secret annex": several rooms enclosed in the warehouse of Anne's father's business. While war rages outside, Anne is a normal teen, thinking at least as much about friends, and boyfriends, and how her parents annoy her, as she does about issues of the day. She is a remarkably clever, thoughtful narrator, and her diary is as entertaining as it is a significant historical document. Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl is required reading for many middle-schoolers, and it will be rightfully upsetting to many of those readers. Though the events within the diary offer only a glimpse of the horrors inflicted on Jewish people by the Nazis, there is a disturbing element of fear throughout. What we as readers know about what happened to Jews outside the world of the book, and what happened to Anne after the book ends, is inescapable in the experience of reading Anne's diary. Many editions of Anne Frank's diary include an Afterword, explaining the events of World War II and the fate of Anne and the other inmates of the secret annex.

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The Outsiders S.E. Hinton  age 12+  Story of ostracized kid a timeless fave of teens, preteens.	Parents need to know that this story of peer pressure, rebellion, and identity centers on two rival groups of teens, the lower-class "outsider" Greasers and the more well-heeled, popular Socs (short for Socials). It includes fighting, underage drinking, delinquent behavior, a rumble, a fatal stabbing, and a suicide. But the indelible characters and compelling story have consistently hooked middle school kids, teens, and reluctant readers since <i>The Outsiders</i> was first published in 1967. This book appeals to preteens because that's the time when kids break into social cliques and life becomes tribal. The feelings of being ostracized are timeless -- which is why this book is still so relevant more than 40 years after its original publication.
The Hunger Games Suzanne Collins  age 13+  Exciting, provocative tale of lethal reality show.	Parents need to know that <i>The Hunger Games</i> is a best-selling story about a dystopian society where the government forces 24 kids to kill one another until only one remains. The main Hunger Games series of three books was adapted into four movies starring Jennifer Lawrence. Even though many teen characters die -- by spear, rock, arrow, knife, fire, animal stings, poisoning, and more -- there are few truly gory moments. Perhaps the worst is when a boy's face is mauled by animals to the point that main character Katniss says there's a "hunk of meat where his mouth was." There are stories about the daily hardships and violence experienced by everyone outside the privileged Capitol, including how Katniss' father died in a mining explosion. Adults drink, including one key adult character who's frequently drunk. Characters kiss and have crushes. Language includes "hell," and there are descriptions of cursing that don't appear in the text. Kids' readiness for this kind of premise depends on their ability to read for a deeper meaning, and there are many layers here to discuss, including how compassion, humanity, courage, and integrity are the seeds of rebellion and hope for oppressed people.
Flesh and Blood So Cheap Albert Marrin	<i>Flesh and Blood So Cheap: The Triangle Fire and Its Legacy</i> by Albert Marrin is a nonfiction account of the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire and its lasting impact on workplace safety and labor rights in the United States. The book explores themes of immigration, social justice, workers' rights, and reform. It contains descriptions of dangerous

	working conditions, graphic accounts of the factory fire, injury, and death, as well as discussions of poverty and exploitation. There is no sexual content. The book provides meaningful opportunities for discussions about history, civic responsibility, and the importance of workplace protections.
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